



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

**RECEIVED**

OCT 02 2015

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL  
POLICY OFFICE

P.O. Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620-0701  
(406) 444-2432  
September 28, 2015

Environmental Quality Council  
P.O. Box 201704  
Helena, MT 59620-1704

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for Montana Fish, Wildlife & Park's Future Fisheries Improvement Program. This draft EA was produced for the summer 2015 funding cycle. The Program plans to provide partial funding to a project with the purpose of securing a split-season instream flow lease to enhance streamflow in Brazier Creek (Powell County). It is considered administrative in nature, as no on-the-ground construction is involved.

The comment period for this EA began on September 28<sup>th</sup> and will close on October 28<sup>th</sup>. An electronic copy of this EA can be found on the FWP Public Notices webpage (<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/>).

Please submit any comments that you have by 5:00 P.M., October 28, 2015 to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Helena at the address listed above. Please note that these EA drafts will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

Michelle McGree  
Habitat Bureau  
Fisheries Division  
E-mail: [mlere@mt.gov](mailto:mlere@mt.gov)

**Draft**  
**Environmental Assessment**  
**Braziel Creek Instream Flow**

**9/28/2015**



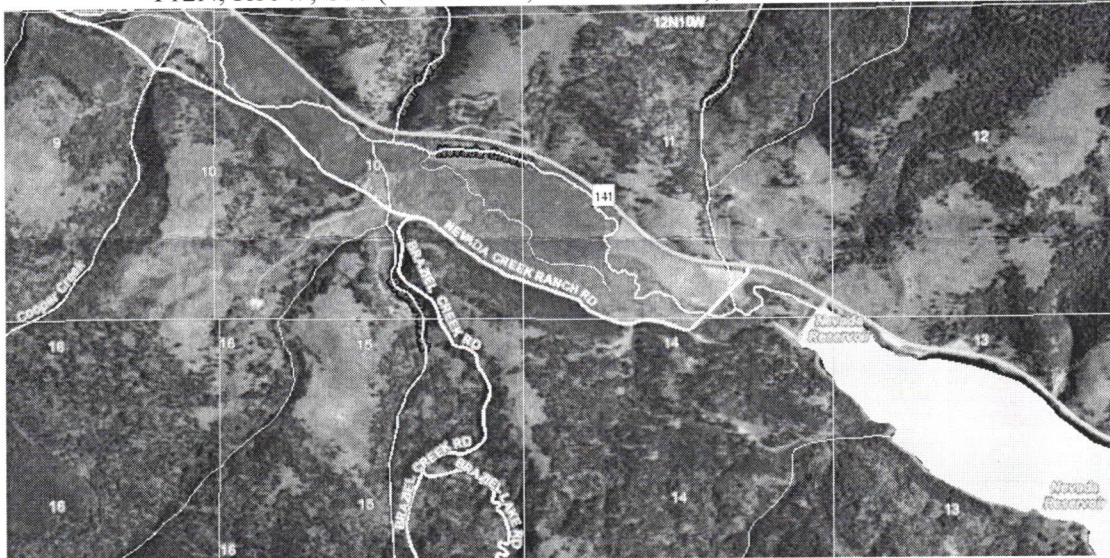
***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

# Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

## PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** Administrative, providing Future Fisheries Program funds to secure a water lease on Braziel Creek for the benefit of westslope cutthroat trout (action will provide funding and will not result in any on the ground work or change in fishery management).
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3. **Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency)**  
Trout Unlimited  
P.O. Box 412  
Helena, MT 59624
4. **Anticipated Schedule:**  
Estimated Instream Flow Lease Commencement Date: 2016  
Estimated Instream Flow Lease Completion Date: 2026  
Current Status of Project: Agreement with landowner completed. Lease needs to be approved by DNRC
5. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):**

T12N, R10W, S10 (46.8077028, -112.8396583); Powell County



6. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

Acres

Acres



(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>33</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

**8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

(a) **Permits:** permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
DNRC	Water Right Change Application

(b) **Funding:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Future Fisheries Improvement Program	\$10,400
Trout Unlimited	\$12,432
Columbia Basin Water Transactions Program	\$36,000

(c) **Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
DNRC	facilitates water resources issues

**9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:**

Brazier Creek (Powell County) is a tributary to Nevada Creek and supports a nearly pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout. Flow monitoring in the area indicated dewatering due to irrigation demand, and this project aims to lease water and secure minimum flows for resident fish. In this project, a lease of 0.5 cfs in a split-season water-rights lease will be obtained from the landowner, associated with reduced irrigation withdrawal. The goal of this project is to protect and enhance native fish habitat by securing additional water for instream flow. Trout Unlimited will hold the water lease with the landowners (Stitt Ranch).

**10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

**Alternative A: Fund the water lease and secure additional streamflow for native fish habitat.**

**Alternative B: Do not fund the water lease, causing the applicant to secure additional funds from another resource or fail to obtain additional instream flow.**

**11. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

DNRC water right change application

## **PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

**Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.**

### **A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation			X			
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species				X		

#### **4. Existing water right or reservation.**

This project does not change water rights of other landowners. It does, however, secure an instream flow lease from the Stitt ranch. The project is purely administrative, keeping water formerly used for irrigation within the stream.

#### **8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.**

This project will affect westslope cutthroat trout, a species that is federally recognized and designated a "Species of Concern" in Montana. The impacts on these species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive. The project may provide significant improvements in habitat within the Nevada Creek drainage. The enhanced streamflow would secure critical minimum flows for resident fish as well as fish inhabiting Nevada Creek.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

## PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

## PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

### 1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>. The EA will have a 30 day comment period.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts and is administrative in nature.

## PART V. EA PREPARATION

### 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? NO If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

### 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Michelle McGree, Program Officer  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
1420 East 6th Avenue, PO Box 200701  
Helena, MT 59620  
Telephone: (406) 444-2432  
e-mail: [mmcgree@mt.gov](mailto:mmcgree@mt.gov)

3. **List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**  
Stan Bradshaw, Trout Unlimited